Modesty Blaise

IN THE BEGINNING

by PETER O'DONNELL and JIM HOLDAWAY

SHOCK MADE MEMORY A SHAPELESS BLUR OF HORROR. THE CHILD NO LONGER KNEW HER OWN NAME. SHE ONLY KNEW THAT SHE MUST ESCAPE... AND SURVIVE ANOTHER DAY AS SHE HAD SURVIVED SO MANY YESTERDAYS
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HERE THERE WERE CAMPS FOR SUCH PEOPLE—FOR THOSE WITHOUT A COUNTRY, WITHOUT BELONGINGS, WITHOUT HOPE. BUT THEY WERE BAD, GRIM PLACES

SHE SELDOM STAYED LONG IN A CAMP. BUT WOULD MOVE ON— TO STEAL IN THE CITY BAZAARS, PERHAPS, OR TO ROAM FOR A WHILE WITH A NOMAD TRIBE
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IT WAS IN A D.P. CAMP THAT SHE FIRST MET THE OLD MAN — AND SAW HIM ROBBED OF HIS MEAGRE RATION OF FOOD
STRANGELY, THE CHILD REACTED AS SHE WOULD HAVE REACTED FOR HERSELF. HER SWIFT ATTACK WAS FEROCIOUS
THE THIEF FLED, HIS ARM RIPPED BY THE WEAPON SHE CARRIED — A LONG NAIL, HONED SHARP AND BOUND WITH WIRE TO A WOODEN HAFT
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THE MAN COULD NEVER SURVIVE ALONE... BUT SHE KNEW SHE COULD EASILY TAKE CARE OF HIM, FOR SHE WAS QUITE OLD NOW — AT LEAST TWELVE
SO BEGAN A STRANGE FRIENDSHIP. HE HAD BEEN SOMETHING CALLED A PROFESSOR, AND KNEW EVERYTHING
THEY LEFT THE CAMP, AND THROUGH A LONG SUMMER HE BEGAN TO TEACH HER. BUT FIRST HE GAVE HER A NAME, MODESTY — AND CHUCKLED AS HE GAVE IT
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FOR FOUR YEARS THIS STRANGE PAIR WANDERED LIKE GYPSIES THROUGH THE MIDDLE EAST... AT TIMES THERE WAS DANGER... BUT TO MODESTY THIS WAS NOTHING NEW
OFTEN SHE STOLE BOOKS, SO THAT THE OLD MAN COULD TEACH HER MORE. SHE SOAKED UP KNOWLEDGE EAGERLY, AND HE WAS VERY CONTENT
SHE CHOSE HER SECOND NAME FROM A STORY HE TOLD HER — ABOUT A KING CALLED ARTHUR, HIS KNIGHTS OF THE ROUND TABLE, AND A MAGICIAN, MERLIN, WHOSE TUTOR HAD BEEN NAMED BLAISE
Modesty Blaise
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AMBITION BURNT FIERCELY IN MODESTY BLAISE NOW. TANGIER, SHE KNEW, WAS A CITY WHERE ONE COULD QUICKLY GROW RICH. THAT JOURNEY WAS THE LONGEST THEY HAD EVER MADE
ONLY FIFTY MILES FROM THE CITY, THE OLD MAN QUIETLY DIED. SHE BURIED HIM IN THE DESERT, AND WEPT FOR THE FIRST TIME IN HER MEMORY
THREE MONTHS LATER SHE WAS SPINNING A WHEEL FOR A SMALL-TIME TANGIER GANG LED BY A MAN CALLED LOUCHE. SHE LEARNED MANY THINGS IN THE NEXT TWO YEARS . . .
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WHEN LOUCHE WAS KILLED IN A GANG BATTLE IT WAS MODESTY BLAISE WHO RALLIED THE GROUP AND TOOK OVER AS LEADER
SHE HAD THE SKILL AND THE WILL TO MAKE HER PLANS WORK. WITHIN TWO YEARS THE GROUP HAD BECOME The Network, OPERATING THROUGH BRANCHES IN MANY COUNTRIES
SHE WAS, AS FAR AS SHE KNEW, ONLY TWENTY — AND THE NAME OF MODESTY BLAISE WAS ALREADY NOTORIOUS. BUT NOTHING COULD EVER BE PROVED AGAINST HER
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THE NETWORK DEALT IN MANY CRIMES. BUT NEVER DRUGS OR VICE. MODESTY BLAISE LOATHED HUMAN DEGRADATION AND THOSE WHO DEALT IN IT. FOR THIS SHE WOULD KILL . . .
IT WAS IN SAIGON THAT SHE FIRST SAW WILLIE GARVIN — IN THAI-STYLE COMBAT, OF LETHAL SKILLS. HE WAS GUTTER-BRED WITH A MIND CLOUDED BY UNREASONING HATRED
A WEEK LATER SHE BOUGHT HIM OUT OF JAIL — WITHOUT STRINGS. TO A DAZED WILLIE GARVIN SHE SEEMED A PRINCESS . . . AND "PRINCESS" HE CALLED HER FROM THAT TIME ON
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WITHIN SIX MONTHS A NEW WILLIE GARVIN WAS BORN — A MAN OF CHEERFUL CONFIDENCE, SHARP INTELLIGENCE, AND ALL HIS OLD CRIMINAL SKILLS . . .
SOON HE WAS MODESTY'S RIGHT ARM IN RUNNING The Network. BOTH WERE UNIQUE, BOTH ORIGINALS. THEY LEARNT MUCH FROM ONE ANOTHER
THROUGH SIX YEARS WILLIE GARVIN SERVED "The Princess". TOGETHER THEY SCHEMED, FOUGHT, BLED, TENDED EACH OTHER'S HURTS . . . AND GREW VERY RICH
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THERE CAME A TIME WHEN, WITH AMBITION FULFILLED, MODESTY COULD SPLIT UP The Network AMONG HER SECTION CHIEFS AND RETIRE TO A LIFE OF EASE
SHE BOUGHT A PENTHOUSE IN LONDON — AND WILLIE GARVIN, ALSO RICH FOR LIFE, BOUGHT AN OLD-WORLD PUB BY THE RIVER THAMES
BUT AFTER THE YEARS OF DANGER THEY FOUND LIFE DULL AND INSIPID WITHOUT THAT HEADY SPICE. ONE SHREWD MAN HAD FORESEEN THIS . . . SIR GERALD TARRANT, OF BRITISH INTELLIGENCE
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THROUGH TARRANT, A NEW CHAPTER BEGAN FOR MODESTY BLAISE. HE ASKED HER HELP AND WILLIE'S, IN A MISSION REQUIRING INTIMATE KNOWLEDGE OF THE UNDERWORLD. AND SO THEY WENT INTO ACTION ANEW . . .
THERE HAVE BEEN OTHER HARD, DANGEROUS MISSIONS SINCE THEN FOR THIS UNIQUE PAIR. BUT THEY ARE NOT EMPLOYEES. THEY TAKE NO PAY. NO ORDERS. AND NOT ALL THEIR EXPLOITS STEM FROM TARRANT
LONG EXPOSURE TO THE CURRENTS OF DANGER SEEMS TO HAVE MADE THEM HUMAN MAGNETS, ATTRACTING TROUBLE. AND THEY ARE CONTENT FOR THIS TO BE SO